



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Doncaster
Marshgate
Doncaster
DN5 8UX

6th December 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP DONCASTER: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 OCTOBER
2020 – 31 AUGUST 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report which covers a longer reporting period than usual. I am very much aware of the amount of effort that goes into producing these reports and thank you for this update regarding HMP Doncaster especially as you had significant vacancies.

I am aware that the Board has not raised any specific issues for my attention but I am grateful to you for prioritising the monitoring that was undertaken throughout the reporting period whilst operating for some time with just one or two members. I commend the Board for continuing to carry out this statutory role so diligently under such challenging circumstances. I am also saddened that the Chair of the Board, who was the member monitoring on his own for some time, passed away recently. I send my sincere condolences to his family and colleagues and thank them, in his stead, for the years he committed to the Board.

It is recognised that much of the reporting period was during the Covid-19 pandemic and I was reassured to receive your comments that the prison has improved across a number of indicators including being safer and cleaner. I was pleased to note that prisoners receive fair and humane treatment and have good relationships with staff. Whilst there is further work to do it was encouraging to read about the progress made in equality, diversity and inclusion and since the reporting period it is welcome that this work has been recognised with the prison being awarded highly commended in the Skills for Justice Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative of the Year category.

I note you have raised two local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP Doncaster.

RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prison Custody Officers

Recruitment of Prison Custody Officers at HMP Doncaster is the responsibility of the Director being a privately managed prison. The HMPPS Controller and onsite team maintain oversight and monitoring of the staffing levels at HMP Doncaster. The prison Director has undertaken a comprehensive programme of recruitment which has comprised of a complete review and overhaul of the recruitment and retention strategy, a revised recruitment approach and a proposal to enhance the terms and conditions for both existing and new staff. These efforts have resulted in the prison being able to successfully over recruit against its normal staffing levels enabling a much more consistent and fuller regime to be offered to the prisoners in its care.

Staff Experience

The recent focus and progress made with recruitment has allowed HMP Doncaster to channel efforts towards training and development of staff to improve the knowledge gap between experienced staff and newer staff or those with less experience. A transformed approach in the training and development of new and existing staff has been evident through the Controller and onsite team engagement with the Director and senior management team at a local level. Enhanced shadowing and mentoring opportunities have been introduced which provide better support to newer staff to assist them in their role of managing complex individuals in a multifaceted environment. It is also welcome that the Board has observed staff developing in terms of expertise and confidence since being inducted.

Prisoners' Earnings

It is recognised that inflationary pressures also affect prisoners and these are kept under constant review and are being managed across several areas. HMPPS have set out some changes to address the issue of increasing prices of canteen items and the impact on prisoners. In September 2022, a national approach to the rising cost of living was agreed and a 10% uplift in private cash allowances, money that can be sent in by family and friends of prisoners, was introduced to help mitigate against price increases. Several new value brand product lines were made available through the Prison Retail service in November 2022, which give prisoners the choice to purchase less expensive, non-premium branded items just as people in the community are doing. Whilst still in early stages, purchases of the value brands are becoming increasingly popular.

In addition, Prison Service Order 4460 Prisoners' Pay policy sets out the national minimum rate of pay for employed activity for prisoners. Governors in public sector prisons and Directors in privately managed prisons have the necessary freedoms to set local pay rates that reflect their prisoner population needs, the type of prison and regime in operation, as well as the jobs, educational and vocational training that are available. Locally the prison has been focusing on improving prisoner access to activities and as such a full prisoner activity and pay review is currently taking place. This review will aim to maximise the purposeful activity spaces available to ensure the maximum number of prisoners are able to engage and receive earnings. The prison will also be reviewing the prisoner canteen offer and where possible source more affordable options.